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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 000509

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SUBJECT: 5/4/08 AMBASSADOR MEETING WITH KUWAITI MINISTER OF AMIRI DIWAN

Classified By: AMBASSADOR FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D

¶1. (S) Summary: In a warm and welcoming introductory call, the Amir's eldest son and Minister of the Amiri Diwan, Shaykh Nasser, acknowledged embarrassment and a bit of GOK confusion over the former Kuwaiti GTMO detainee's reported terror attack in Mosul, and outlined an optimistic economic vision of a northern Gulf entrepot connecting Asia and the Mediterranean, to include - at an appropriate time - Israel. The Ambassador raised the critical need for additional support for Iraq and flagged Kuwait's trafficking in persons problem. End summary.

¶2. (C) Minister of Amiri Diwan (and eldest son of the Amir) Shaykh Nasser Sabah al-Ahmed Al Sabah warmly welcomed me for an introductory one-on-one May 4 that lasted nearly two hours. Shaykh Nasser spoke proudly and with great fondness of his close friendship with President Bush and the Bush family, and of the US-Kuwaiti relationship overall. He shared his vision of Kuwait as the tourists' "gateway to Mesopotamia," noting that Ur (the birthplace of "father Abraham") was closer to Kuwait than to Baghdad, and expounded at length on "the Amir's goal" to see Kuwait reduce its dependence on oil and return to its mercantile roots. Key to this would be the development of a major port with significant storage facilities, linking Kuwait, Iraq and eventually Iran, which would in turn link - via rail lines and highway grids - "Asia to Aqaba, and beyond, into the Mediterranean." An important factor in this regional integration, Shaykh Nasser pragmatically noted, would be, "ultimately, of course," the inclusion of Israel, and specifically its "Qualifying Industrial Zone," thus creating a free trade zone linking Palestine, Jordan, Iraq and Kuwait. The entrepreneur-cum-minister spoke excitedly of what he claimed was Jordan's new-found capability to produce uranium from potash, which in turn could be used as the region migrated from fossil fuel to peaceful nuclear use.

¶3. (S) Thanking Shaykh Nasser for his country's recent hosting of the Iraq Neighbors' Ministerial, which had gathered the largest number of attendees to date, I noted that I was coming directly from meetings between Kuwaiti intelligence and Foreign Ministry officials and a U.S. team led by AMB Satterfield, a senior MNF-1 commander and several officers and analysts from Baghdad and our Iran office in Dubai. I shared with Shaykh Nasser our analysis of PM al-Maliki's recent efforts in Basrah and urged greater Kuwaiti support for the national government in Baghdad, to include sending an ambassador. I noted that we similarly were urging the Iraqis to expedite naming an ambassador to Kuwait, but meanwhile the GCC states should not lose an opportunity to influence Baghdad - leaving the field to the Iranian ambassador there.

¶ 4. (S) Alluding to the reported suicide bomber attack in Mosul by former GTMO detainee and Kuwaiti national Abdullah al-Ajmi, I stressed that this was a pivotal moment in Iraq, and that our self-interested GCC partners, themselves vulnerable to the fallout of a destabilized Iraq infested by al-Qaeda, needed to do more to prevent the flows of foreign fighters, particularly when they are known quantities. Shaykh Nasser visibly winced when I mentioned Ajmi, saying "This is so embarrassing for us."

¶ 5. (S) Continuing, I noted that the American people were beginning to ask if our Arab partners were as committed to success in Iraq as we were; if not, they would question why we remained at great cost to our national well-being. Shaykh Nasser suggested, "Perhaps you will just have to protect your friends in the region for now, and hope things work out." I replied this was not an option; Iraq's stability had direct bearing on Kuwait's security; we were fortunate the reported Ajmi event had not been catastrophic for U.S. troops; we needed Kuwait to support our efforts, especially now as eradicating al-Qaeda and constraining Iranian influence were in the balance. The public line that Ajmi had traveled on a "fake passport" did not ring true; Kuwait had the latest in passports, with imbedded safety features and bio data. Shaykh Nasser acknowledged his government was seriously reviewing the issue, trying to determine how Ajmi had slipped into Mosul; they were seeking evidence beyond an alleged phone call from a friend, and were contemplating sending a forensics team. Shaykh Nasser suggested Ajmi may have traveled on an

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illegally issued passport. (Note: We were subsequently told by FM Dr. Mohammad (reported septel) that Ajmi had successfully sued the Ministry of Interior in Kuwaiti courts for the return of his passport. Dr. Mohammad also stated the Kuwaitis were hoping for forensic evidence from the U.S. side. End note.)

¶ 6. (C) Continuing on Iraq, I applauded the minister's vision of a bustling port serving the northern Gulf, but noted that we first needed a point man on the Kuwaiti side who could facilitate our joint efforts to clear the Khor Abdallah; I urged them to focus on this first step. On Iraqi debt, I acknowledged Kuwait's patience in collecting and urged creative solutions; Shaykh Nasser pushed back gently, underscoring the size of the debt and its impact on Kuwait's credit ratings - "it's on the books" - but suggested Kuwait and Iraq were looking at joint infrastructure projects, such as the creation of a northern Gulf "entrepot," which, through creative profit sharing could lead to a reduction in official debt.

¶ 7. (C) Thanking Shaykh Nasser for his time, I reiterated the fundamental strength of the relationship, and that I would speak frankly as a friend who had Kuwait's best interests at heart, interests I noted we shared. In this vein, I raised the sensitive issue of trafficking in persons. Acknowledging that avoiding the exploitation of global flows of relatively cheap "human capital," refugees from inadequate or failed economic or political systems, was a challenge we all faced, I urged greater attention to this problem. During my nearly quarter of a century working among and with Muslims, I noted, I had seen the compassionate, charitable and generous face of Islam; this was the face I hoped to see Kuwait present to the world. I expressed hope we could work together to remedy the harsh conditions of so many workers in Kuwait.

¶ 8. (S) Comment: "Wishful thinking," i.e. that hoping it's not so will make it so, whether concerning al-Qaeda, Iraq, human trafficking, or waning U.S. public support for defending friends who will not themselves take courageous steps, seems to be the default mode here; that and the notion - as perceived to be the case in the lower Gulf states - that economic development will suffice to make all political

problems go away. Clearly our work is cut out for us here.
End comment.

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